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A NEW CHAUCER ITEM.

Every detail in the life or work of one of our older authors is so important, so necessary in building a structure that can never be too complete, that we all wish to know as early as possible any new discovery. It is pleasant, therefore, to call attention to a new ray of light on the life of Chaucer, first seen by a worker in another field. In the scholarly and ample *Histoire de Charles V* by R. Delachenal, the first two volumes of which appeared in 1909, the author notes that Chaucer acted as confidential messenger to Edward III in connection with the peace negotiations at Calais in 1360. The record, though brief, is more than suggestive of larger things. In the Exchequer Accounts preserved in the Public Record Office, Bundle 314, no. 1, M. Delachenal found this slight entry :¹

“Datum Galfrido Chaucer, per preceptum domini, eundo cum litteris in Angliam iii real. [. .] x s.”

To understand the relations of this brief entry it is necessary to bear in mind the events of this important time. In the spring of 1359 the truce of Bordeaux had expired, together with its extensions to St. John's day, June 24. During the summer the English king made extraordinary preparations for an army to crush France once for all.² With this army, too, Chaucer, then a young man of nineteen or twenty, entered upon his first military experience. At the last of October the grand army of Edward left England, and early in November marched from Calais, its objective the holy city of Reims where French kings had been crowned for centuries. There it was Edward's purpose to take the French crown,

which he claimed as his by right of inheritance. Then he would conquer the country he already considered his own. But the campaign went badly for the great commander, as it went badly for his less exalted subject, the young esquire. Reims would not surrender herself even to the great Edward, and the young Chaucer, probably in some too-bold foraging expedition, fell into the hands of the enemy.

After the unsuccessful siege of Reims for some weeks, Edward salved his wounded vanity by marching still further into the heart of France in January, 1360. On March first of that year he also ransomed his young retainer, the poet, perhaps with money he had too easily extorted from the duke of Burgundy for immunity from invasion of his lands. When the English king finally reached Paris, things went little better than they had done at Reims. The crafty duke of Normandy would not accept Edward's challenge to fight, and famine forced him to march off toward Brittany. In May, however, while at Brétigny near Chartres, the English king was persuaded to accept terms of peace. These terms, roughly sketched at the little village which gives its name to the treaty, were to be worked out in detail at Calais during the following months.

Immediately after the peace preliminaries at Brétigny, Edward III and the four sons who had accompanied him³ in the campaign returned to England.⁴ Edward, and doubtless his sons, sailed from Honfleur, landing at Rye on the evening of the 18th of May. Then, too, if the usually reliable *Fædera*⁵ is to be followed, the king mounted his horse at once and reached London by nine o'clock the next morning. That the Black Prince, the prince of Wales, was also in England soon after is evident from another fact. In July, with the duke of Lancaster, he escorted the captive king, John of France, to Dover, perhaps to Calais, on the return of the prisoner to his native country. The company rode by way of Canterbury, made the same halts for the night as

¹ *Histoire de Charles V*, II, 241, footnote. In reviewing M. Delachenal (*Eng. Hist. Review*, Jan., 1910, p. 160), J. F. Tout mentions the latter's note on Chaucer thus: "M. Delachenal (II, 241) quotes from an Exchequer Account evidence that Geoffrey Chaucer, already ransomed from his short captivity, was a humble participant in the negotiations of October, 1360, at Calais, being sent thence by royal precept with letters to England." From this, however, one would scarcely gather the importance of this new note.

² Froissart's *Chronicles*, I, ch. ccvi; Johnes's *trans.*, I, 269.

³ Froissart's *Chron.*, I, ch. ccvii; Johnes, I, 269.

⁴ Thomas Gray's *Scalaonica*, p. 196.

⁵ Rymer's *Fædera*, VI, 196. It is a tall tale, since Rye is fifty-five miles from London as the crow flies. But sometimes distances, like nice customs, "curtsy to great kings"; or better still, such a journey was not impossible to strenuous Edward, not yet forty-eight years old.

Chaucer's Pilgrims are generally believed to have done, that is at Dartford, Rochester, and Ospringe,⁶ and like them reached Canterbury on the fourth day. As Chaucer was in the household of Lionel, or of his countess wife, we must suppose that he too returned to England in May, 1360.

In August Edward sent the prince of Wales over to Calais, to continue the negotiations begun at Brétigny and elaborate in detail the terms of peace. He left London August 24 and remained at Calais until November 6, when he was again in London. This exact statement of time is based upon another Exchequer record found by M. Delachenal. It shows that the prince was paid a pound a day for seventy-five days, or from August 24 to November 6 inclusive.⁷ The treaty itself was signed October 24.

It was during these negotiations that Chaucer was a bearer of letters to England. So far as we know, Lionel, earl of Ulster, to whose household Chaucer was attached, had not gone over to Calais with the prince of Wales. This would seem to show that Chaucer must have been detached, temporarily at least, from Lionel's household, and have been more directly in the king's, or at least the prince's employ. While both Lionel and Edmund, as well as the prince of Wales, were with their father, the king, in the final ratification of the treaty, there is no reason to believe that they preceded him to Calais. Edward himself did not go until October. On the other hand we do know that Chaucer had ridden the campaign in France with the division of the prince of Wales, to which the other sons of Edward were attached, and possibly at this time the future poet had attracted the attention of the Black Prince.⁸ In any case, the payment for Chaucer's services on this occasion, by order of the king himself, throws new light upon the poet's detachment from the service of Lionel.

⁶ Furnivall, *Temporary Preface to the Canterbury Tales*, p. 129; based on *Comptes de l'Argenterie*, published for the Société de l'histoire de France by L. Douet-d'Areq.

⁷ *Histoire de Charles V*, II, 241; Exchequer Accounts, Bundle 314, no. 2.

⁸ Froissart's *Chron.*, I, chap. ccvii; Johnes, I, 269: "Next marched the strong battalion of the prince of Wales; he was accompanied by his brothers." I hope soon to print a study of this campaign of 1359-60, with special reference to Chaucer, and shall then give more fully my authority for some of these statements.

The record gives no further hint of the character of Chaucer's services. The "letters" doubtless related to the peace negotiations themselves, probably to difficult points upon which the prince of Wales wished special advice from the king. Perhaps they referred to a most vital point then being pressed by the French representatives, the renunciation of the title "king of France" made by Edward III at Brétigny. This renunciation was now wholly omitted from the terms of the treaty of Calais. It was a clever move on the part of the French negotiators, for by this omission the treaty appeared to disregard such claim on the part of Edward. Whatever we conjecture, the service itself speaks for the recognized trustworthiness of the young poet. It was a first, and possibly not an unimportant step toward the position in the king's household of a few years later, and even toward the diplomatic positions which another decade brought to him.

Further than this, the new fact regarding Chaucer gives at least some definite data for a period hitherto a blank in his life. After his ransom by the king, March 1, 1360, we have had no record of him until June 20, 1367, when the king granted him a pension of twenty marks a year as "our chosen valet."⁹ It is true that a pension of ten marks a year to Philippa Chaucer, on September 12, 1366,¹⁰ is usually supposed to be indirectly connected with her marriage to the poet about that time. But direct reference to Chaucer himself does not occur until the following year.

We now know, however, that as early as the beginning of the period 1360-67 Chaucer had been selected for a mission of trust by the king, or by the highest in authority next to the king, the prince of Wales. There is thus more ground than has generally been supposed for believing Chaucer may have had, even so early, some connection with the king's service. Some years ago Professor Skeat conjectured this with assurance. He says: "He [Chaucer] must have been attached to the royal household not long after the return of the English army from France."¹¹ Mr. Kirk, also, in *Forewords to Life Records* (1901) argues for the same idea, on the ground that the annuity granted Chaucer in 1367 must have been

⁹ *Life Records of Chaucer*, p. 160.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹¹ *Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, I, xx (1894).

for service extending over some considerable time.¹²

One further note of interpretation may be ventured. Apparently the record above was made at Calais, since it refers to bearing letters to England [in Angliam] rather than from France. This would also account for the reckoning of the compensation in French reals, followed by the statement in English shillings. At least such a supposition would explain the last part of the entry, even though the ms. is illegible, as shown by the brackets. Exactly the same reckoning in French and English money occurs in the expense accounts¹³ of King John's return to France, already mentioned as taking place in this same year. We there learn also the value of the real, three times mentioned as equivalent to three shillings.¹⁴ We may thus infer that the completed Exchequer record would probably read, "iii real[s, some word for 'valued at', i]x s."

The French historian adds no comment on the record he has discovered, except to say that he does not know whether it has been found by Chaucer's biographers. Nor does he suggest the possibility of other information regarding Chaucer in the unpublished Exchequer accounts. It would seem not unlikely that something more may yet be found, in spite of the fairly thorough search which has been made. Yet even if this should not prove true, every Chaucer student will be grateful to M. Delachenal for this single gleaning regarding the poet's life.

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Contributions à l'Étude de l'Hispanisme de G. E. Lessing, par CAMILLE PITOLLET, Paris, Félix Alcan, éditeur, 108, Boulevard St.-Germain, 1909, large 8vo., xiii and 342 pp.¹

It is impossible to follow this work throughout all of its details, without a study quite as minute and painstaking as that of the author. From this may be inferred that the material gathered from everywhere is unusually large. This review will therefore be limited to two considerations: first, the value of the work as a scientific contribution; second, its qualities apart from the subject, that is, its readableness. These two must be kept separate for reasons which will become evident.

The author divides the book into two parts, and proposes to answer two questions: first, "à quel degré Lessing savait-il l'espagnol?" In this connection he uses "several translations or fragments of translations which were made by Lessing at different stages of his career." Second: "à quelles sources Lessing a-t-il puisé lorsqu'il a parlé de l'Espagne?" Here the author intends to show, that, in as much as Lessing had only "confused and rudimentary" notions of the language (a basis to be established by the answer to the first proposition), he must have had recourse to intermediate sources for his information and judgment on Spanish writers.

An unbiased and careful examination of the question of Lessing's *hispanisme* makes it undeniable that the very general traditional acceptance of his authority in the field of Spanish has gone too far; that the available facts of his learning and of his sources have not been accorded the full investigation which they have deserved. Owing to this circumstance, literary historians in general, and *Lessingforscher* in particular, were not only sure to meet with criticism of their own attitude, they were bound to witness an inevitable reaction against the prestige enjoyed by Lessing in Hispanic matters. It was, therefore, merely a ques-

¹² "He was in the king's service during the greater part of that period [1360-67], as he received an annuity at the end of it. *Life Records of Chaucer*, p. xv.

¹³ *Life Records of Chaucer*, Appendix II, p. 129.

¹⁴ Compare, "Le Roy, offerande a la messe, a Eltan [Eltham], 1 royaul, 3 s."—p. 129. "Monseigneur Philippe, pour semblable, en ce lieu, 16 royaux, 3 s. piece, valent, par mons. de Jargny, 48 s."—p. 131. "Mons. Philippe, pour semblable, 1 royau, 3 s."—p. 132.

¹ Cf. also a Reprint from "Vragen en Mededeelingen op het Gebied der Geschiedenis, Taal en Letterkunde," entitled *L'Hispanisme de Lessing*, by the same author, in which he says: "Nous voudrions, dans l'objective *Selbst-anzeigs* qui va suivre, donner . . . quelques nécessaires compléments, dont plusieurs ne seront que des corrections, etc."